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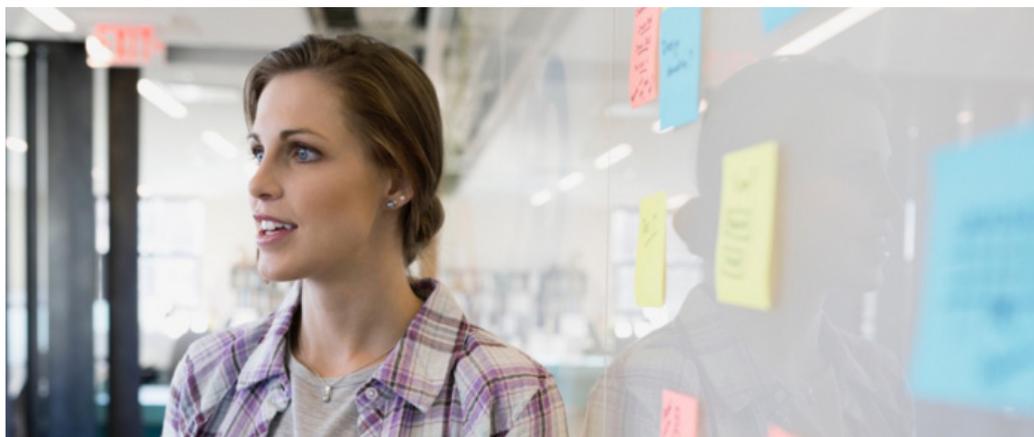
Mapping the Customer Journey

We interviewed our Director of Experience, Lynn Koble, to learn why today's top brands map their customers' journeys at every step—and how any company can get started.

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How do you define the customer journey and a customer journey map?

A customer journey is a person's path of interactions over time and place toward achieving a goal. The interactions are driven by both emotional and functional considerations, and may be heavily influenced by brands. It's important to note the plural—brands—which recognizes today's complexity in an interconnected age. That complexity means there will never be only one customer journey, and journeys will never be static.

The customer journey map is an illustrative representation of a single journey. Typically viewed through the lens of a persona, the map will often include thoughts and emotions, steps, channels, touch points, and places. While the map captures these elements from a customer perspective, it may incorporate business processes and functional areas, from marketing to sales to operations, in the context of how they influence the customer experience.

What's really important about this approach is that it's from the customer perspective, and that it identifies opportunities across an entire organization beyond marketing and internal silos.

You mentioned customer experience. Can you elaborate on the role the customer journey plays as part of the larger experience?

Because a customer journey focuses on one path, it's a facet of the overall customer experience: the combination of all interactions, over time, that ladder up to a customer's perception, connection, and ultimately their relationship with a brand.

Today, customer experience is multi-faceted and constantly evolving. Customers move fluidly between channels and contexts at various stages of engagement with a brand, product, or service, making customer experience even more challenging and complex to orchestrate.

Complexity keeps coming up. Why is it so important for complex organizations to invest in customer journey maps?

Any organization looking to strengthen interactions with customers and prospects can benefit from looking closely at customer journeys. For complex organizations, they're especially important: Internal silos and external partnerships can lead to a fragmented, incomplete view of the overall customer experience.

Also, even though business groups may be responsible for specific products or customer interactions — a marketing email or a customer support phone call —the customer doesn't recognize that internal structure. They experience every interaction as part of a larger journey.

Using a holistic approach to journey mapping that focuses on the customer perspective while accounting for business considerations opens the door to greater opportunities across the entire organization.

Customer journey maps also provide focus for investment of time and resources. Complexity can make those decisions feel overwhelming, but if organizations can focus on one customer journey, and even one problem area of a single journey, they can create meaningful, measurable improvement in the experience. For example, we worked with one large client in the payments industry to focus on the welcome experience for onboarding new businesses. They had already identified an attrition problem, and we were able to make real, tangible changes that achieved their goal.

Does it matter, then, if your organization is B2B, B2C, or even B2B2C?

Whether you're B2B, B2C or B2B2C, the principles are the same: Organizations will always have interactions with customers, and the customer perspective is an essential consideration. From consumers to intermediaries to employees, great customer experiences come from recognizing and valuing customer journeys—and the many factors that influence them.

With a B2B2C organization, it's important to ask the question: are we considering employees and intermediaries only in terms of how they influence the end customer, or are they themselves a priority customer whose experience we need to consider and curate? But again, the principles in how you approach each type of audience remain consistent.

How can you start building a customer journey map?

Start by looking at your business objectives and identifying related customers and customer journeys—and priority areas. In the example I mentioned earlier, our clients' business objective was to increase usage of a particular product. They knew they were seeing a big drop-off between application start and platform onboarding, so we knew where in the journey to focus attention. Beginning with a specific objective in mind is very powerful. Sometimes it's not an issue you're solving for, but a specific goal (building awareness with a new target market, for example).

Tap into the customer knowledge you already have on hand. Many organizations have research and insights about their customers, from personas to data analytics. These are great for developing hypotheses about journeys and how those interactions relate to business processes and functions.

This information-gathering process often reveals gaps and raises questions: Which journeys do we map? What components do we want to capture, from emotions to processes to content? How do we account for internal silos and external partnerships?

Even though we all know customers are the key to any organization, it's very easy to lose sight of what they actually think, feel and experience, in context, compared to what we might expect. While journeys are constantly changing and often complex, one thing is certain: they should always start with the customer.