

RACONTEUR

# Unified Customer Experience



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As the customer journey becomes increasingly complex, it has never been more important to offer a smooth and unified interaction. What opportunities are unlocked when you integrate your front-end functions, across sales, marketing and customer experience?

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## CUSTOMER JOURNEY

# Flourishing in the golden age of customer experience

Customer is king, in-store and online, so businesses must provide a purchasing experience that is fit for royalty – wherever they make the final sale

**Nick Easen**

There's no doubt that organisations today increasingly understand the meteoric rise in importance of the customer journey. We find ourselves in the golden age of customer experience; the new battleground for businesses ushered in by a digital revolution. The ultimate prize for companies is repeat purchases, infectious word-of-mouth promotion and greater market share.

However, some companies are struggling with what the customer experience really means to them as their sales, marketing, operations and customer support functions still act in silos. At the same time, there's been a proliferation as to when, where and how people interact with companies.

"Today's customer journey has many jump-on and off points. Customers enjoy flitting from one channel to another to browse, research, compare, try, buy – often starting online with the research process means there is no neat, linear sales and customer service journey," states Michelle Du-Prât strategy director at Household, a retail insights consultancy.

This creates issues for businesses. Ask Apple or Amazon, who have actively reconfigured their operations so they get a more holistic and overarching view of their customers and service offering.

"The best experiences involve the entire customer journey, from consideration to transaction to usage post-purchase," explains Douglas Hollinger, senior vice president of consulting at LiveArea.

"Thoughtful experiences help customers



make difficult buying decisions, considering the entire ecosystem and context of product usage. We are therefore seeing a move by some leading companies to realign their organisational structures, integrating teams that were previously split up."

## Linking up marketing, sales and customer support

Defining successful customer experience in 2019 certainly involves much more collaboration between the corporate disciplines. They align for brands to connect with the customer at a deeper level, tapping into their growing need to make more conscious consumption decisions.

It is imperative that no opportunity is lost to service a customer with a unified, data-empowered view, particularly as

consumer-facing businesses face cutthroat competition – a phenomenon increasingly filtering into B2B. Executives are being made to sit up and listen to the long-suffering demise of the UK high street and US main street, as well as the meteoric rise of online shopping.

“The greatest wastage typically happens between marketing and sales activity. Campaigns are not followed up, while sales and marketing leaders do not collaborate at sufficient level of daily detail,” states Martin Hill-Wilson, founder of Brain Food Consulting.

“Whatever converts customers has to be designed into the purchasing journey. You can spend a lot on customer experience and marketing programmes, especially in the digital environment, and not necessarily get good returns.”

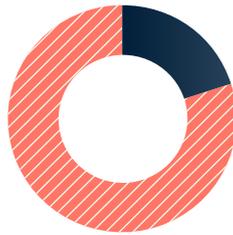
In an era of increasingly squeezed margins, companies may also be misguided to only focus on gaining new customers – when finding ways to maximise revenue from existing customers is much less costly, and can make a huge difference on profits.

“[Businesses] should be looking to own as much of the customer journey as possible, making every step better for the customer and in turn owning more of the sales and marketing opportunity,” says Dani Bassil, CEO of marketing agency Digitas. “If you look at Amazon, it’s not about selling individual items for the highest possible price. It’s about making sure that whenever someone wants to buy – or watch or listen to – it’s the customer’s first destination because of ease and convenience.”

### Seeking agility in customer experience

The shift to experience-led purchasing is diluting the influence sales managers have over strategies and targets. This has forced them to seek greater collaboration with other teams traditionally less directly involved in the sales process including marketing and customer support, digital and social media teams.

“This has proven to be a challenge for established brands where legacy organisational structures obstruct effective collaboration. As a result, smaller start-ups with flexible structures are gaining significant ground in the battle for superior



**20%**

of organisations have no existing CX strategy

Dimensions Data 2019



**40%+**

of people say they prefer to complete their entire shopping journey on mobile, from research to purchase

Google 2018

customer experience,” says Chris Longman, head of digital intelligence at digital agency Salmon.

The rise of disruptive, direct to consumer, digital native brands, such as Dollar Shaving Club for men’s toiletries, Casper for mattresses or Warby Parker for glasses are cases in point. They are customer-centric, put data and technology at the heart of their business and by going direct to the consumer are able to have a single view of their customer. They are also capable of getting new products in front of customers in a matter of months.

Being lean, nimble and able to innovate at a rapid pace is now crucial in the marketplace – and successful pioneers do this by combining elements of tech, strategy and customer experience. In finance, digital bank Monzo is a good example. It has raised more than £200 million in funding and plans to expand into the US, as it acquires up to 100,000 new customers a month.

“Monzo is a fantastic example of how customer experience can drive customer acquisition and revenue. Their highly rated mobile app puts experience first and has left the established banks playing catch-up,” states Mr Longman.

The company has built trust in its digital brand through ‘radical transparency,’ which involves sharing everything with Monzo’s employees and customers, so you can see failures and successes. They’ve developed smartphone apps to allow consumers to manage their finances by setting themselves budgets and tracking expenditure. In many ways it’s been about creating a digitally-fired community around the brand. Almost all growth comes through organic word of mouth.

“Data sits at the heart of customer experience decision-making. Brands should recognise that what works today may not work tomorrow, and they must continuously optimise at speed and scale,” states Mr Longman.



**Customer relationship management tools are crucial to both making a connection with and knowing customers’ preferences**

**Michelle Du-Prat**  
Strategy director, Household

## AI ENABLEMENT

# AI enables agility on the evolving customer journey

As expectations around customer experience continue to change and evolve, AI and analytics tools are giving businesses the agility to respond to consumer needs

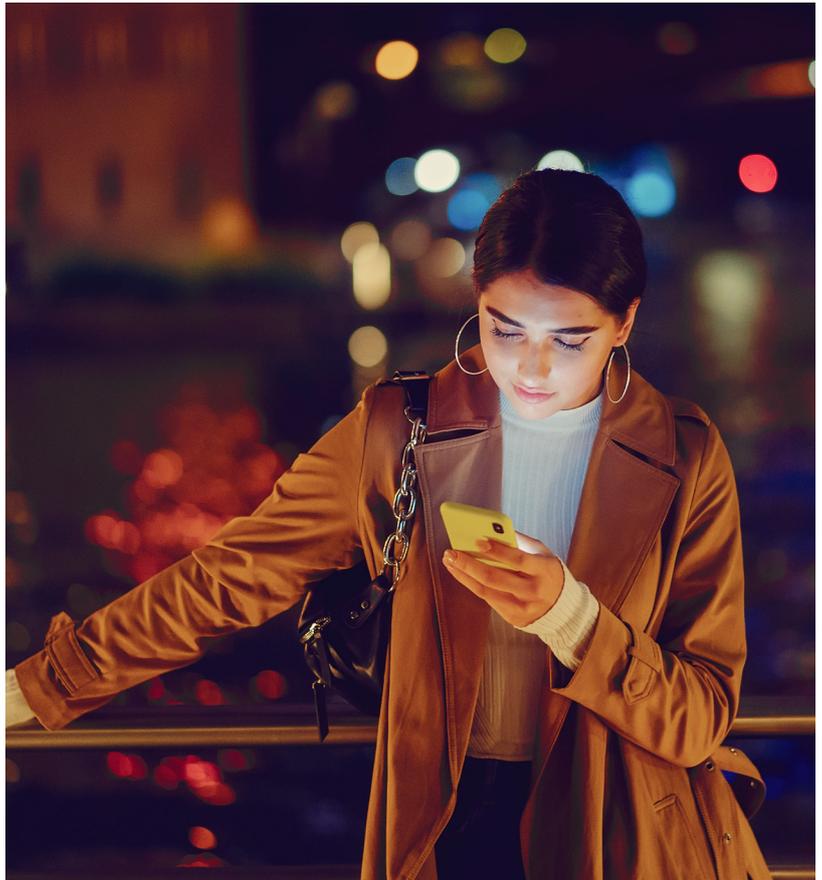
## Ben Rossi

**I**n this fast-changing business landscape, the increasing consumer demands for quality, on-demand services pose a huge challenge and opportunity for companies. Organisations are under huge pressure to innovate and reinvent their services to meet demands for instant gratification and access to information from anywhere at any time.

Customer experience is key to success and differentiation in the digital age, but with expectations and behaviours constantly evolving, it can be difficult to keep up. Agility, therefore, is a crucial ingredient as businesses implement systems that allow them to constantly identify and feed customer insights into improving products and services.

Improving the experience for customers requires a greater understanding of their needs. Companies typically begin this process by analysing the customer journey from start to finish, assessing where technology and human interaction can be most effective.

Reed, the UK-based employment agency and online jobs board, uses AI and machine learning to better understand the behaviour and intent of its job-seeking and recruiting audiences. The insights allow Reed to provide more relevant search results to jobseekers and a more accurate shortlist of candidates to recruiters.



The company has also built two chatbots using Microsoft technology, including an FAQ bot for jobseekers, freeing up its CX teams to focus on more complex issues. This reflects what analyst firm Gartner sees, with its predication that chatbots will power 85 percent of all customer service interactions by 2020. The customer should always be top the agenda however, despite efficiency savings no doubt aiding the business case of implementing AI and improving staff productivity.

“If the technology fails to do this, you risk prioritising business efficiencies over your customers,” says Karen Pope, head of customer at Reed. To overcome this challenge, businesses should rigorously test technologies such as AI and analytics, before



they are rolled out and launched, to prove they will really enhance the customer experience.

“No matter how efficient robots are, we will always provide friendly, human consultants who can serve to reassure and help customers in a personable way, which machine intelligence cannot do,” Ms Pope adds. “We apply a sense of balance and are able to build efficiencies into our service while ensuring we always put customers first.”

Finding that blend between human and machine interaction is crucial when it comes to dealing with customer complaints. Companies can enhance brand equity and promote customer loyalty by enabling consumers to raise complaints in a frictionless yet impactful way.

The key challenge today is the expectation



**70%**

of organisations believe that providing an easy resolution was the most important requirement in CX efforts

Dimension Data 2019

for complaints to be managed across numerous channels simultaneously. A business may have long mastered in-store complaints, but now needs to offer consistency and the same level of sensitive response and resolution on the telephone, online, social media or through an app.

Nowadays, the post-sale experience for customers is equally important, with companies being called out for failing to handle complaints and queries quickly enough. An emerging tool to help brands tackle this is sentiment analysis; where AI based platforms can help customer service teams analyse tone and intention through automation. For example, when a customer sends an email, tweet or message, the sentiment of the interaction can be analysed – with the customer then re-directed to the most appropriate sales representative.

Once sentiment is identified, linking this to accessible online resources that consumers can consult before needing additional assistance will not only ease the strain on customer service teams, but even boost sales through increased engagement. Hence post-sale support along the customer journey cannot be overlooked in its importance for retention, as well as helping grow revenue per customer. Such self-service resources include chatbots, virtual agents, product tracking

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**No matter how efficient robots are, we will always provide friendly, human consultants who can serve to reassure and help customers in a personable way**

**Karen Pope**

Head of customer, Reed

and relevant content.

“These are all becoming table stakes for websites and it is the contextualisation and availability of this content which is key,” says Leigh Gammons, chief growth officer for Cognifide, WPP’s technology consultancy. “For example, if a customer looks online for a power outage in their area today, this information needs to be up to date and easy to find, or even delivered without [having to search] through geo-location technology.”

Knowing the journey that customers are embarking on, as well as where they are potentially abandoning the process or coming across sticking points, allows businesses to deliver a smooth, consistent and personalised service. Companies that continuously experiment with data are likely to create the most seamless and user-friendly experiences.

Booking.com is honing its ability to leverage and integrate AI with its booking assistant chatbot and traditional customer service solutions. The chatbot is now able to respond to 60 per cent of English customer enquiries – and when it can’t, it pulls in support from Booking.com’s customer service team or the property that is being booked.

“We are on the cusp of a future in which the user experience melds cutting-edge technology with human connection,” says James Waters, VP of commercial operations at Booking.com. “When you land on our site and aren’t sure where you want to go yet, we can make suggestions leveraging all past user data and machine learning models. The potential for an instantaneous and seamless customer experience is immense.”

As machine learning and data science continue to advance rapidly and new levels of personalisation become possible, further disruption of the customer experience is inevitable. The ability of big companies to be agile is crucial to staying on the front foot.

Data allows organisations to pick up different types of consumer signals and offer them the right kind of content at the best time. Such capabilities, along with the insights and visibility provided by AI and analytics tools, are central to enabling businesses to achieve the evolving components of a successful user experience today. It empowers them to have more relevant conversations at every stage of the customer journey. ●



55%

of companies surveyed said that by 2020, they wanted their AI strategy to be 'established'

CX Network, 2017



## CX of the first order

First impressions count. Microsoft revealed a website begins losing traffic to competitors when it takes 250 milliseconds longer to load, demonstrating the weight customers place on their first experience with a brand. In the world of commerce, the first-time experience of completing an order is crucial when, according to Bain & Company, improving customer retention by just 5 per cent can boost profits by up to 95 percent.

Amazon has now become synonymous with smooth customer experience; using product searchability, AI-driven personalisation, smooth checkouts and ultra-fast delivery. Alexa, Amazon’s virtual assistant, relies on maintaining an ongoing relationship with consumers beyond a positive first experience. This has been key to its continued success. After realising the initial enthusiasm from users when they first buy a product tends to wear off, Amazon runs an outreach programme with weekly emails detailing new functions of the product.

“The aim is to ensure users keep extending the breadth of their usage and indeed their relationship with Alexa,” says Michael Richards, MD of digital agency Unlimited Group. “Clearly this makes sense for tech products with constant iterations of firmware and features, but it should also be a good model to follow for other sectors too.”

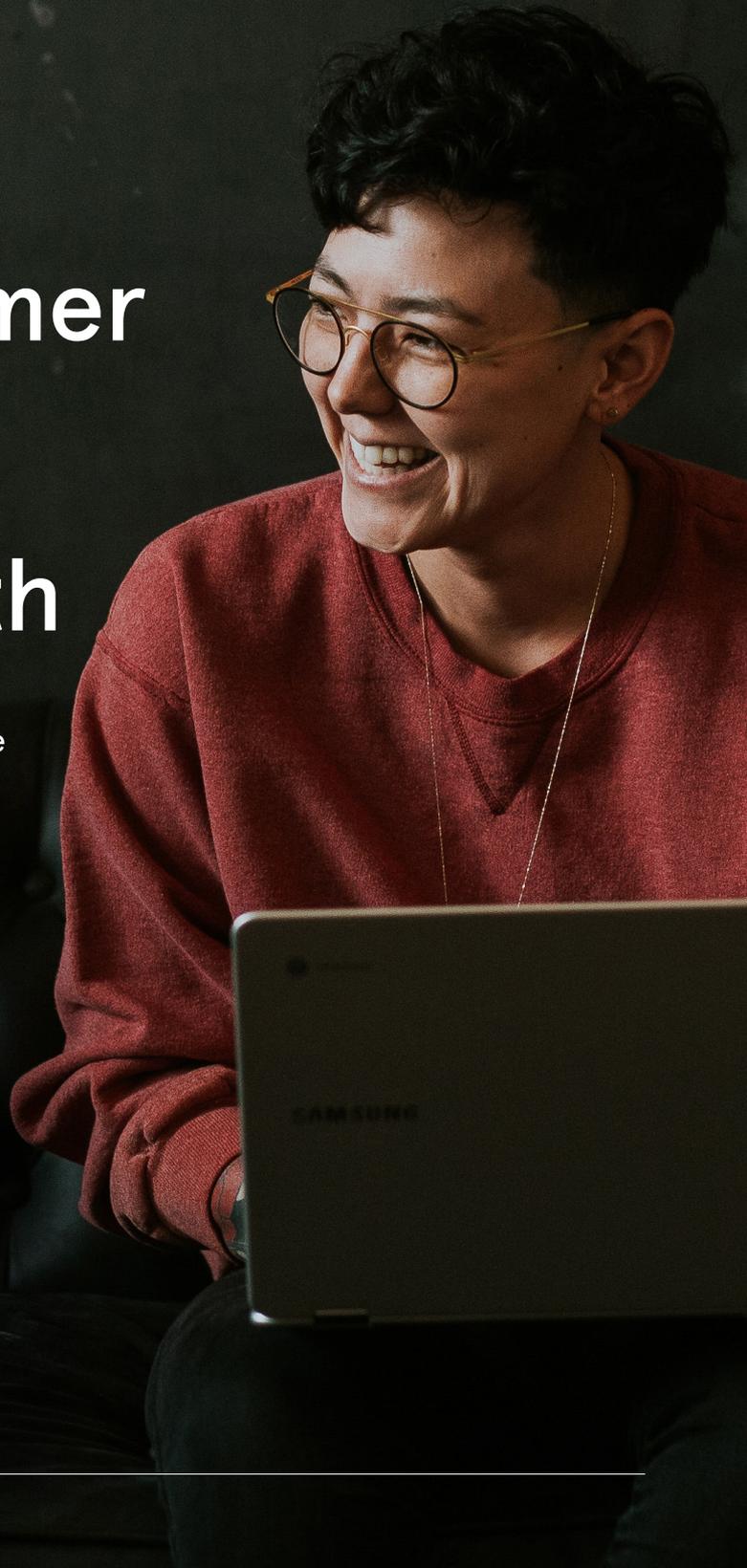
## CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

# Keeping customer experience at the core of business growth

It used to be that companies lived or died by the strength of their products and competitive pricing. Now we are witnessing a sea-change in the software industry

**C**ompanies gain customers, capture market share and develop brand affinity through customer experience. Increasingly, experience can make or break a corporation, as customers demand excellent service and immediate results.

In this new era of high expectation, businesses need to adopt a more holistic view of the customer journey, bringing all aspects together when it comes to digital and physical experiences. Companies that don't effectively join the dots between sales, marketing, operations and customer support will be eclipsed by their more proactive competitors.



“Customer experience needs to be at the core of every company’s culture and, if employees are to provide exceptional experiences, they need to be empowered with the right set of tools that work seamlessly across disciplines and cut across data from different departments,” explains Sridhar Iyengar, head of European business at Zoho, a business software company, which serves 45 million users worldwide.

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**Many businesses still have legacy systems, siloed data and departments that don’t talk to one another, which creates barriers to delivering a cohesive experience**

The engines of growth in the software industry will be companies that provide affordable customer experience platforms, which bring in reliable, secure and compliant data storage, as well as more powerful data-processing capabilities on the cloud.

Customers interact with brands on multiple channels, including online chat, mobile phone, social media and messenger apps. A centralised system that can bring context to all the data and interactions generated from different channels is increasingly imperative.

But many businesses still have legacy systems, siloed data and departments that don’t talk to one another, which creates barriers to delivering a cohesive experience. A well-integrated



customer experience platform offers a single, 360-degree view of the consumer, encompassing many of the touch points prevalent within the omnichannel experience.

“Cohesive platforms with a suite of apps that talk to one another make a lot of sense. So do simple and actionable analytical tools that are business centric,” says Mr Iyengar. “There’s no doubt we need a new generation of digital tools that are able to organise, view and make sense of the vast tranches of data.”

Customer experience platforms are now increasingly used by smaller, younger companies that don’t have legacy systems, enabling them to be more agile than larger corporate behemoths and offer superior customer service.

“Every company, big or small, is now stepping up their game. Businesses want a seamless overview rather than a clunky, disparate one of the customer. Get it right and you have a more engaged and higher-quality interaction with your clients. It is a complete game-changer. This is essential when you are competing for customers’ time and effort, their mind-share and wallet,” explains Mr Iyengar.

95%

of customer interactions projected to be carried out by some form of artificial intelligence by 2020

Servion Global Solutions, 2018

35%

of companies reported that integration with existing/legacy IT systems was their biggest barrier to investment in AI

CX Network, 2017



A unique selling point for Zoho's applications is that they are all based on the same technology stack. This is the magic glue that enables information to flow seamlessly from one application to another.

"Time and again we've seen clients using several vendors or legacy systems, one for sales, another for marketing and fulfilment, and these systems just don't speak to each other very well," says Mr Iyengar. Data engagement is crucial in an era driven by customer experience. You need a set of

defined processes to collect, input and utilise customer information. Companies also need to train people and invest time and money to reap the rewards.

"That's why we run webinars, provide case studies, peer-to-peer learning and have an active user community. It's about utilising data-powered software in the most optimised way possible," says Mr Iyengar. "What's exciting is that we are now employing artificial intelligence (AI), machine-learning and bots to enhance customer experience, as well as drive better data analytics and business decisions."

Zoho, for example, has a conversational AI assistant called Zia. She analyses data from various modules within the customer experience platform, helping to provide context by predicting the outcome of sales activities. Zia also understands the sentiments of a response and assigns the case to the right customer representative. Simply fulfilling an order, shipping it, selling it or marketing a product isn't enough anymore. The new paradigm is about delivering more holistic business value.

"What's incredible now is that we can measure the effectiveness of every activity from the beginning. For example, if the social media team runs a campaign, they can clearly see the value the campaign created on customer relationship management and in-turn measure the customer response and engagement," explains Mr Iyengar. "It connects all major functions and data on a single platform, increasing the visibility and fostering collaboration, while keeping accountability with the right team or individual".

Compliance is also a big issue in a post-GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) world. It means organisations need to better understand what data they hold, how they have gained permission to hold it, why they keep it and with whom they are sharing it. Data privacy and protection has remained a serious priority for Zoho.

Lastly, businesses cannot forget to focus on the human factor in all this. "For Zoho, it's also about improving and facilitating the best human interaction in the customer experience space," Mr Iyengar concludes. "Technology has to complement human interactions; that's been our mantra since we started back in 1996."

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Businesses cannot forget to focus  
on the human factor in all of this

For more information please go to [www.zoho.eu](http://www.zoho.eu)



Zoho is the operating system for business—a single online platform capable of running an entire business. With apps in nearly every major business category, including sales, HR, marketing, customer support, accounting and back office operations, and an array of productivity and collaboration tools, Zoho is one of the world’s most prolific software companies. In 2017, Zoho introduced the revolutionary Zoho One, an integrated suite of applications for the entire business.

For more information, please visit [www.zoho.eu](http://www.zoho.eu)

Zoho respects user privacy and does not have an ad-revenue model in any part of its business, including its free products. More than 45 million users around the world, across hundreds of thousands of companies, rely on Zoho every day to run their businesses, including Zoho itself. Zoho Corporation is privately held and profitable with more than 7,000 employees. Zoho is headquartered in Chennai, India, with European headquarters in Utrecht (The Netherlands). Additional offices are in Austin (US), Pleasanton (California), Singapore, Dubai (UAE), Yokohama (Japan), and Beijing (China).

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**Publisher** Emily Summers

**Project manager** Elaine Zhao

**Editorial consultant** Gren Manuel

**Editor** Peter Archer

**Design** Grant Chapman, Samuele Motta

**Head of production** Justyna O’Connell

**Digital marketing manager** Fran Cassidy

**Contributors**

**Ben Rossi**

Formerly editorial director at Vitesse Media and editor of *Information Age* and *Computer News Middle East*, he writes for national newspapers and business publications.

**Nick Easen**

Award-winning journalist and broadcaster, he writes on science, technology, economics and business. He has produced content for BBC World News, CNN, Time magazine, Bloomberg, CNBC, *The Times*, *Guardian* and *Telegraph*.

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