

We spoke to Isabella Villani, CEO of Exceed Global about the connection between a great customer and employee experience and a successful business – with a particular focus upon an intuitive and tailored customer experience.

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 experience. 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?

A: There should definitely be consideration of emotions in the customer experience. For example, when you're doing customer journey maps, you will always factor in the emotion of the person at that particular time.

From a business perspective, it's important to think about a customer or employee's 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.

It's also important to have an element of reactive and proactive customer communication. Leveraging data and really customising the customer experience will help you understand where your customers are and allow them to communicate in their channel of choice, rather than making them swap to channels that suit you as a business.

As we understand our customers a lot more and how we can leverage data strategically, companies can make the customer experience more seamless and intuitive. However, we don't want customers to think that their privacy and data security has been breached in the process.

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 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: Can you name any great customer/employee experience examples?

A: I don't feel that any organisation in Australia is doing customer experience end-to-end really well. Many organisations are doing certain aspects of it well, but most are still on a transformational journey.

With technology and customer demands changing, organisations are constantly challenged by trying to keep up and deliver a great customer experience. This isn't surprising when you consider the huge cultural and operational shift needed to drive this kind of transformation.

Globally, lots of big brands talk about doing customer experience really well, but whether or not they do is a different thing (e.g. Apple, Amazon, Google). Sometimes the businesses delivering the best customer experience are not the big brands at all. An equally good customer/employee experience can be delivered by the coffee shop down the road, where there is a barista who remembers who you are and what your coffee order is, and you can tell that the employees there are happy.

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 their behaviours, so in the next two years, we will see companies use data to not only personalise the customer experience, but to eliminate white noise.

Going forward, CEOs and boards will really start to understand the important link between customer and employee experience, and the financial success of the organisation. To drive business success, remain competitive and speed to market, leaders need to be more savvy and intuitive about customer preferences, leveraging data to enhance the customer experience.

Q: Do you think it will be human skill or technology that will create the customer experience of the future?

A: I think the customer experience of the future is going to be a mix of both human skill and technology. As customer experience becomes more complex, we require a highly skilled work force to manage customer interactions across multiple channels.

Customer expectations around technology and data capturing are also changing. For example, a customer might call up and say, “I know my call is being recorded. I have a problem with my bill and you know this from my last bill. Rather than me telling you this again, why don’t you listen to that last call recording and tell me what’s wrong?” So customers are expecting you to use the latest technology to deliver a more efficient service.

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

A: What customers want is ease of doing business. They want organisations to make their life 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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