



## **Managing Touch Point Value: 10 Steps to Improve Customer Engagement**

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A long-term patient goes to a doctor for an annual physical, completes the required paperwork and checks out. Months later, the patient receives a bill indicating the health insurance company denied part of the service. The doctor's office can't explain why—they use a third party billing service and don't know anything about the bill. The billing service won't help—they just do the paperwork.

After numerous calls to the doctor's office and insurance company, the patient gives up and pays the bill. But, but when asked by a new neighbor for a doctor in the area, the patient recommends they look elsewhere.

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Customer experience and engagement have evolved from table stakes to points of differentiation, as indicated by the flurry of customer experience/relationship scores now being published. More and more evidence strongly suggests that there is a link between customer experience/engagement and the financial success of the company.

So, how can your company improve customer experience and engagement? We have found that successful companies identify all the key customer touch points, measure their effectiveness and use them to create a map of the customer experience.

### **It All Begins with Touch Points**

A customer experience does not begin and end at a transaction, website visit, or conversation with an agent. The customer experience process encompasses the moment the customer becomes aware of your company and is comprised of multiple independent interactions, transactions, and contacts along the way. Ron Shevlin, author of *Everything They've Told You About Marketing Is Wrong* and an analyst at Aite Group, LLC, suggests the following definition for customer engagement: "Repeated interactions that strengthen the emotional, psychological or physical investment a customer has in a brand."

All these repeated interactions are actually touch points. For our discussion, we will define a touch point as any customer interaction or encounter that can influence the

customer's perception of your product, service, or brand. A touch point can be intentional (an email you send out) or unintentional (an online review of your product or company). Touch points can occur long before a customer actually makes a purchase and long after they have made their first transaction. The goal of every company interested in leveraging customer experience as a competitive advantage is to create a positive and consistent experience at all of the touch points.

The vast number of touch points associated with the overall customer experience makes for a complex process. Therefore it is important to understand how each touch point contributes to the overall customer experience because an issue encountered at any one of these points can dramatically influence the overall experience. By measuring each touch point independently you can determine its contribution to the overall effectiveness as well as more effectively measure the total customer experience.

Although overarching metrics such as customer satisfaction and customer advocacy are quickly becoming standard metrics today, attempting to measure the customer experience with a single metric can be overly simplistic and risky. Effectively managing the customer experience requires effective measurement and management of a portfolio of metrics, including touch point effectiveness, to gain the insights into what is—or is not—working.

## **Inventory Your Touch Points**

Before you can begin measuring the effectiveness of each touch point we have found that it helps to take an inventory of all the touch points encountered by your customers. To get started, create a table format consisting of at least these six columns: touch point, life cycle stage, operational purpose, role in customer experience, touch point owner, and importance/impact.

### **Step 1: Take stock of your touch points.**

Now using a process map methodology, write all the touch points your customer can encounter throughout their entire life cycle. Your touch points need to include every encounter in the attraction process, such as your website, blog, email, newsletter, press coverage, articles, industry events, webinars, brochure, product literature, advertisements, etc to samples, white papers, product demos, initial calls, sales presentations and meetings, to your contract, product deployment or delivery process to your customer service, invoice, trouble ticket, to a loyalty card or referral program in your retention process. As you can see for most companies this is going to be a fairly long list.

### **Step 2: Create the chain.**

Organize all of these post-it notes on a wall in the order they most likely experienced grouped into the various life cycle phases. Then take each touch point and list it in its order in the first column on your table. You now have a map of your touch points and a

list.

### **Step 3: There is a time for each touch point.**

We can think of the customer life cycle in terms of attraction/awareness; interaction/consideration; cultivation, buyer, user, repeat customer, and advocate/recommender. Complete the fourth column of the table by indicating where the touch point is typically encountered in the customer life cycle. Your map should help you identify which part of the life cycle a touch point belongs to. If something appears out of sync, revise it on your map and in the first column.

### **Step 4: Every touch point has a purpose.**

Each customer touch point serves an operational purpose. On the operational side a touch point may be designed to identify a prospect, resolve a problem, accelerate conversion or support executing a transaction. For each touch point, indicate its operational purpose in the second column. The touch point should also have a role in the customer experience such as influencing perception, building preference, or creating loyalty. For each touch point indicate its role in the customer experience in the third column.

### **Step 5: Identify ownership.**

Lastly, each touch point is primarily owned by some part of the organization. For example, appointment scheduling may be owned by pre-sales, invoicing by accounting, and the website by marketing. In the final column, indicate the primary owner for each touch point.

### **Step 6: Rate the touch point's impact.**

While all touch points matter, they are not equal. A bad experience on one touch point may be enough to make a customer leave you but a bad experience on another while irritating and potentially damaging if fixed in time can be overlooked. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being doesn't have high impact on the experience and 10 being has very high impact on the experience, score each touch points impact on the experience. This step may require you to do some customer research.

### **Step 7: Complete the map.**

Draw a line across your map. For each touch point on your map indicate it rating of 1-10 and which quadrant it is in. For those touch points that have an importance rating of 8 or higher move them above the line (keep them in the order), just move them up. For those that are a 6-7 on importance move them onto the line. And those touch points that are 5 or lower on importance move them below the line.

## **Assess Each Touch Point's Effectiveness**

Now that you have a complete inventory of all of your touch points, and you understand the impact of each touch point in the experience as well as operational purpose and

customer experience role for each touch point, you can assess the effectiveness of each touch point in terms of achieving its intended purpose against both operational and customer experience objectives.

### **Step 8: Score your effectiveness.**

Add two more columns to your table, one column labeled operational effectiveness and the other labeled customer experience effectiveness. Again, using a scale such as 1-10, with one being extremely ineffective and 10 being extremely effective score each touch point and indicate the score in the appropriate column. Assessing the effectiveness of impact on the customer experience may require soliciting customer feedback.

### **Step 9: Analyze what is and isn't working.**

Create a 2X2 grid with one axis labeled operational effectiveness and the other labeled customer experience effectiveness and map each touch point onto the grid. Each touch point will fall into one of four quadrants on the grid—high/high effectiveness, low/low effectiveness, high operational/low customer role effectiveness, low operational/high customer role effectiveness. The mapping will allow you visualize whether and where there are weak links in the overall experience. Indicate the quadrant for each touch point back on your map.

### **Step 10: Action plan.**

For each touch point you now have three pieces of data: an impact/importance score, an effectiveness score, and a point on the grid. For those touch points that were in low/low quadrant of the grid that have a rating of 8 or higher for importance (they are above the line), develop, publish and implement a corrective action plan.

For this process to be successful you need to see your business through the eyes of your customer. If you find this difficult, engage customers from your customer advisory board or council to participate in the process either in the front end or to validate the final map. Because the touch points occur throughout the organization, be sure to include all the touch point owners in the scoring and corrective action plan steps.

The map and inventory enables you to use these touch points to reinforce your value proposition with customers and employees. Every interaction matters. Delivering great customer experience isn't something a few people in the company need to do; it's something that everyone in the company needs to do. Customer experience and engagement is a core competency and one that every company needs to cultivate.

Lastly, for any customer engagement initiative to be successful, you need to be focused and committed. In the dynamic environment we're in right now, we need to recognize that customers are re-evaluating everything. If it has been awhile since you last acquired customer feedback, don't put off this research any longer. In today's environment it pays to be smart.