

Customer Centricity – Is It About Simplicity?

by Andreas Iatridis

We are all consumers and whilst we come to buying decisions differently, how we would like to arrive at the point of purchase is generally the same i.e. We want the ability to conclude the process quickly and efficiently, and where necessary get instant access to answers. Some of us are more patient than others and despite our different characters we all have one common driver – Simplicity. We want to be able to transact seamlessly, with no distraction or delay. When we come to a positive buying decision the action is about buying now!

The first place we land on is a company’s website. This is nearly in all cases the second stage of the customer journey. We all come to this step via different channels whether it be a search engine, advertising, referral or the media they are all designed to ultimately get us here.

The website itself is multi-functional and needs to deliver on a multitude of functions. These can be broken down into 3 main categories all of which revolve around the customer journey and experience.

Firstly it is there to sell - acquire new customers as well as support existing ones. Many businesses have different ways of doing this some better than others. Research tells us that this is about product positioning and messaging:

- Pricing has to be transparent
- Product packages clearly communicated
- Navigation easy and relevant

Secondly a website is there to answer questions and act as a source of access to information providing customers with:

- Self-help
- Chat support
- Telephone support
- Social support

Thirdly it is about account management providing the customer with everything they need to manage their online account, a great foundation on which loyalty can be built. Basic functions in this area cover:

- Profile creation & management
- Subscription services & management
- Account deletion

These are the types of services that can be delivered depending on the business’s nature. The golden rule, no matter the complexity of this ecosystem, should always revolve around the customer and simplicity. This is where the uniqueness and character a business displays, comes to reality. This first port of call is what will define the customer experience. It will either be an effortless one where a buyer searched, found and purchased with little or no engagement with the business. Or it will be a frustrating and lengthy experience where the buyer had to not only engage, but wait... And then there is the full spectrum of what happens in between these two extremes.

It is a question of perspective. Who is looking not at what, but from where? A business no matter its size must be customer centric more than ever, especially today. However most businesses are built from the inside out. They tend to be introspective in regards their approach as to how they showcase their offerings. It is not looking at the other side of how a “buyer” or “visitor” will travel through their site and engage across various touchpoints.

A sales VP I once worked with told us to engineer a sale backwards i.e. from what the ideal landscape should look like to what is the reality today. This approach was very helpful in pre-empting potential stumbling blocks and setting realistic goals. The people behind a business seem to forget that they too are consumers who want the same thing, a simple journey.

Where are we going wrong? It is worth looking back 30 years when websites were largely informational i.e. an online means to search for and obtain information on a business. It was about online publishing much in the same way offline publishing was already available via brochures, magazines and sources like the yellow pages. The mentality was about having an online presence to deliver information on a product or service which usually directed consumers to a bricks and mortar premises.

It would appear that the jump from offline to online did not explore the landscape prior to the internet. How did people purchase before then? The answer is straightforward; They would visit a shop browse and buy, or not buy, and depending on the service they received would either recommend or not recommend. This is the simplicity a lot of businesses have to explore today regardless of whether they are a software vendor, car manufacturer or online retailer.

We don’t want to be pushed when online and we do not need chat pop-ups or other notifications – These distract and delay. A chat asking the question; “Can I help you?” is a good example. If I am here, I am here for a reason and until I need help please stop asking! It is exactly the same as visiting a shop and being followed around by floor staff who are eager to help. The principle online is exactly the same. What is important is that help is there when needed. Distractions which do not add to the journey only cause frustration and delay which often result in lost sales.

Below I have illustrated in simple terms how an ideal journey can take place. This displays 2 scenarios and the route each takes as a buyer and a visitor respectively. In both cases it is progressive, easy and most of all no pushy distractions:

A Perfect Customer Journey



To be customer centric a business needs to be able to look inwards from the customer perspective to test and experience the journey from their side. This should be a proactive exercise where they can experience how the business communicates, how their mailing strategy runs, the try and buy process, is self-help helpful and much more.

Exploring how the process for customers can be simplified will not only increase sales, but also result in higher satisfaction and retention. It is about having a progressive journey that takes you from A to B efficiently. Simplicity is a vital element to being Customer Centric and the ability to show your customers that you do indeed know what they want.

