

Put yourself in your customer's shoes.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Here yesterday, gone today. In this unprecedented time in business, companies that have been around for longer than a century have suddenly folded, our economy has been blind-sided, and the stock market has nowhere to turn but down.

The Contact Center Experts at Align provide solutions to achieve business results and exceed customer expectations.

Everything has been impacted. Employees looking forward to the upcoming holidays are, instead, looking for work. Many firms are in survival mode, addressing short-term issues just to keep day-to-day operations moving.

But what about your customers? What is it like in their shoes? Yesterday, your customer had a secure relationship with a venerable firm, today, they don't know who to call to find out about their very future. Even the customers not directly impacted by this upheaval are beginning to question their loyalty – have they put their faith in the right firm?

HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR CUSTOMERS IN THE SHORT TERM?

In the midst of addressing a company's immediate survival concerns, there needs to be someone concerned about "shoes" – specifically, your customer's shoes. By wearing them, one can begin to see what kind of experience a customer has with the company. This relationship needs to be strengthened by evaluating the interface from the outside, in. Start asking questions from the customer's point of view, like:

1. What company am I doing business with?
2. Is my contract still valid with the new company?
3. Is my main contact person still employed?
4. How do I reach someone who can help me?
Did the phone number change?
5. Which website do I go to for help?
6. Is the contact information on the material I received still valid?

Once you start thinking like the customer, you can start developing an action plan to address the issues.

You need to have an approach that quickly gets information out to your customer base – that addresses their immediate concerns.

The approach is going to be somewhat different for each organization. You have to find ways that will enable you to get the pertinent information out there quickly and effectively. Perhaps something in an FAQ format might be a valid approach. Since you are now thinking like the customer, put the customer's likely questions into writing, and address the questions with the pertinent answer.

Once you have taken care of the immediate needs of your customers, you need to start looking at your Customer Touchpoint strategy.

CUSTOMER TOUCHPOINTS – DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY

What is a “Customer Touchpoint”? It can be anything that “touches” customers, including marketing brochures, letters, Directory Assistance, emails, Interactive Voice Response applications, web sites and applications, invoices, etc. Once you realize how many there are across both organizations, you will understand the challenge it is to modify them.

Changing Touchpoints must be done in a strategic manner. Unfortunately, many of the Touchpoints are under the control of different groups within the organization, and they are generally disparate from a customer information perspective. The process of bringing the appropriate parties together, and determining an appropriate Customer Touchpoint strategy, is necessary and critical in any organization, but particularly for an organization that has acquired a business and is addressing a new customer base, as well as an established customer base.

WHAT STEPS NEED TO BE TAKEN?

- Step 1: Develop the Customer Touchpoint strategy.** Stakeholders in the customer interaction and the firm’s leadership need to be involved.
- Step 2: Examine all of the existing Customer Touchpoints.** Do they currently meet the strategy? What needs to be modified? This will require the participation of the entire organization.
- Step 3: Develop an implementation plan.**
- Step 4: Develop an internal and external communications plan.**
- Step 5: Train internal staff.**
- Step 6: Develop the requisite processes and procedures** to facilitate the unified management of the Touchpoint strategy, and to accommodate changes that must be made down the road to the various Touchpoints.

SUMMARY

Change is dramatic, especially when that change is completely unexpected. Customers who are impacted by that sudden change need to understand that they can still count on you. Acting decisively and quickly to address your customers’ immediate needs and concerns is the critical first step. Developing an effective, long-term strategy to address the ongoing customer interaction will go a long way to ensuring a lasting relationship with that customer. An effective Customer Touchpoint strategy is in the critical path to bringing that to fruition.

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