

A TouchPoint Exercise to Help Retain Customers

by Rick Barrera

TouchPoints are points of contact between your organization and your customers. I divide these TouchPoints into three categories: Product TouchPoints, Systems TouchPoints and Human TouchPoints. I do this because most businesses put too much focus on one type of TouchPoint which causes the customer experience to be "unbalanced" and therefore inconsistent.

We have all experienced a restaurant with great food but poor service, or great service but poor food, or even great food and service in a poor location with dirty or old infrastructure. Each of these restaurants is at risk of failure for differing reasons. By understanding the different types of TouchPoints and ensuring a consistently extraordinary experience across all three types, each restaurant could dramatically improve their odds of success.

TouchPoints Defined

Product TouchPoints include anything your customers' touch they get to keep. Your letterhead, newsletters, brochures, books, etc. are all examples of Product TouchPoints.

Systems TouchPoints include anything your customer touches they DON'T get to keep. Examples include your parking lot, building, office, furniture, phone system, restroom and website.

Human TouchPoints include you and your office staff, as well as your deliverables team of outside experts. They could also include any service personnel, courier staff, valet, doorman, or security personnel in your building.

By examining all three types of TouchPoints in your business, you will be able to quickly identify where your customer experience is strong or weak enabling you to create a more uniform and exceptional experience.

Start by making a comprehensive list of your entire customer TouchPoints. Then sort them into the Product, Systems and Human TouchPoint categories. If you are unsure about a category, just put it in the one that seems most logical to you. Be sure to include some of the more intangible TouchPoints like your reputation, the comprehensiveness of your products or services, ease of doing business with you, your responsiveness and speed of service, and the quality of your deliverables team.

Next, look at the TouchPoints in each category and rank them in order of importance FROM YOUR CUSTOMERS' POINT OF VIEW. Then, ask your customers' to rank them for you. To check your understanding of your customers and what they value most in their interactions with you, score your list against theirs.

For example, if you ranked an item as number 1 and your customer ranked it at number 5, your score would be a minus 4 for that item. If you ranked an item as number 7 and they ranked it as number 1, your score would be a minus 6 for that item. In other words, to get a perfect score, you must rank them exactly as your customer ranks them. (You can do this exercise category by category or you can create one master list, rank each

item and then ask your customers to do the same.)

The important part of this exercise is not your score. It is the ensuing discussion with your customers' about why they ranked each item where and how they did. The score is merely a numeric model for the level of connection or disconnection between your mindset and your customers' thinking about where and how you deliver value. These differences are NOT trivial. They should guide your thinking about every decision you make in your company and how those decisions might impact your clients' experience of your company.

The insights you'll get from this exercise will be invaluable as you begin to redesign your business to deliver even greater value to your customers. I recommend repeating this exercise each year as a way to fine tune your thinking and to deepen your understanding and connection with your customers. This is the real magic that comes from analyzing and understanding TouchPoints.

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