

Brand Management: What's Customer Experience Got to Do with it?

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For an organization to be truly customer-centric, it must have a CX vision and objectives that support the brand vision and business goals.

-- Beth Karawan, Co-founder & EVP, ImprintCX

As it turns out, everything! If the ultimate objective is profitability -- and the purpose of marketing is to influence customers to take action that will generate revenue, and the goal of customer experience is to deliver on the promises made by marketing -- then these groups/functions/tasks can no longer continue to operate in silos.

Brand Management and Customer Experience: Two Sides of the Same Coin

“[Branding](#) is the summary of all the touchpoints a person has with a brand.”

– Russell Banzon

Or, said another way:

“Customer experience is the perception customers have of your brand based on all interactions with the brand.”

– Ed Murphy, Co-founder and President, ImprintCX

In many organizations, brand management and customer experience are treated as separate tasks with different goals and objectives. According to a 2021 Qualtrics [study](#), only 28% of marketing and CX leaders have processes allowing the brand strategy to feed into CX design and delivery. The lack of processes is usually because of a misconception that brand management is a “marketing” thing and that marketing is considered a profit center, while CX is perceived as a tactical function and treated as a cost center. In fact, brand management and CX are two sides of the same coin. Eric Shulz said, “A [brand](#) is an experience living at the intersection of promise and expectation.” To take it one step further, CX is the intersection of that brand promise and expectation. Therefore, **customer experience is brand management in action.**

For an organization to be truly customer-centric, it must have a CX vision and objectives that support the brand vision and business goals. It is a mistake to treat them separately, especially since both require the same things to be successful.

	Brand Management	Customer Experience
C-suite and leadership teams define the overall strategy	✓	✓
Requires buy-in and commitment from the whole company	✓	✓
A shared sense of ownership helps employees feel connected to the promise	✓	✓
It is everyone's responsibility, whether directly or indirectly engaged, and everyone understands their role in building and delivering the brand promise	✓	✓
Requires insights from different departments and working cross-functionally to align customers' perceptions and expectations with what the company wants the experience to be	✓	✓
Marketing teams are responsible for the message and consistency of communication	✓	✓
Customer-facing Sales teams can make or break brand perceptions	✓	✓
Customer Support teams are the guardians of brand reputation	✓	✓
Guidelines that are written out and easily accessed by all employees ensures consistency of communications and experiences	✓	✓

Whether an organization is B2B or B2C, selling FMCG or SaaS, the management of the brand and the experience customers have with that brand must be holistic. One cannot be managed without impacting the other. When they are treated as separate functions with different objectives, that misalignment will lead to miscommunication with employees as well as customers.

Brand Management: Customers Define The Story

It is also important to acknowledge the brand conversation has changed, and now customers are in charge: they are the ones to dictate what they want from the brands they use and their expectations of those brands.

Historically, marketers created stories around their brands to make them desirable and aspirational to customers; their brand was the only brand that could fulfill any functional or emotional need customers might have and make their lives better, happier, more successful, etc. But as Lior Arussy, Co-founder and Chairman of ImprintCX, states, "The future [story](#) of every brand is no longer brand-centric but rather customer-centric."

Customers no longer aspire to be part of a brand's story; they pick and choose brands based on the story they want to tell about themselves. Customers do not like to have

to decide between either/or options; they want brands that can fulfill their contradictory needs and desires. Customers do not make brand choices limited to the functional equation of “economic costs/benefits”; they also want brands that fulfill their subconscious emotional [needs](#) without really knowing or being able to explain why.

Customer Experience: A State of Confusion

“[Customer experience](#) is one of those topics that people hear mentioned and often think is something else.”

– Eric Ullman, CCXP

Ask 10 different people to define CX, and you will likely get 10 different answers that are close but not entirely accurate: the service a company provides to customers, the experience a customer has with customer support when there is a problem, how a company treats its customers, how a company makes customers feel, etc.

As mentioned earlier, CX is the delivery of a brand promise made by marketing. However, when defined in isolation, it is still unclear what value there would be to having a CX strategy. A CX strategy should have objectives and initiatives aligned with the brand vision. Every touchpoint along the customer journey should be designed to fulfill the promises made by the brand.

Unfortunately, the CX industry has backed itself into a corner, with too much emphasis on single-number metrics, checklists for implementation, and producing overwhelming amounts of data, and not enough focus on strategic insights and recommendations, deep human understanding, and practical application.

- The Net Promoter Score ([NPS](#)) was created as the best one-question indicator of repurchases, referrals, and other customer behaviors that contribute to a company's growth. Adoption was widespread, as business leaders across different B2B and B2C organizations believed the simplicity of this one-number solution was all they needed to predict customer loyalty and its impact on financial outcomes. A single number is easy to understand, but **the focus turned to increasing the score rather than improving the experience.**
- Voice of the Customer (VoC) programs provided additional context for understanding customer experiences, continuously measuring every single touchpoint along the customer journey, and keeping track of metrics on easy-to-use platforms. In time, **having a VoC program became shorthand for “doing CX.”** However, most VoC platforms are sold by SaaS providers, not CX experts. A “successful” VoC program is often seen as the technology being implemented correctly, not the value delivered. These programs produce massive amounts of data; creating a cohesive story about the insights gleaned from the data and an action plan to improve the customer experience requires additional expertise that usually comes at a cost.

- A cottage industry of “certified” experts and “CX influencers” emerged who may or may not have real-world, practical experience designing, implementing, and managing strategic CX transformations. Many professionals who obtain these certifications understand the theory and offer handbooks and templates to enable implementation, but don’t practice the application on a consistent basis.

By focusing on tools and tactics, CX has been reduced to individual tasks completed in a linear process that does not demonstrate the overall value of customer experience to the C-suite. If a CX strategy is not tied to measurable business objectives such as retention, increased loyalty, or customer lifetime value, it will suffer the same fate as other “bright, shiny object” initiatives – started with great focus and enthusiasm, eventually abandoned when the [ROI](#) cannot be proven.

Brand Management and Customer Experience: The Key to Successful Alignment

Successfully implementing brand management and CX depend highly on organizational alignment. However, business teams have traditionally been incentivized to compete with each other, leading to a zero-sum game in terms of budget, executive attention, and [recognition](#). Unfortunately, according to the Frontify Brand Ownership Report 2021, this is how many organizations continue to operate.

- Marketing and CX teams have access to reams of customer data and insights, but frequently, that information is not cross-shared. If functional silos exist and information is not leveraged holistically, then an organization cannot be genuinely customer-centric and create experiences that deliver business results.
- Marketing cannot be responsible for creating brand positioning and messaging and expect the rest of the organization to inherently understand it, let alone adopt the behaviors needed to support it. As Lior Arussy says, “You can’t learn to swim by reading a book.”
- Surprisingly, customer-facing teams, such as Sales and Customer Service, are usually the least [engaged](#) with the brand strategy. It is highly problematic if these teams don’t have a strong sense of brand co-ownership and alignment, as this can lead to inconsistent experiences that erode customer trust.

“Cross-functional collaboration is one of the keys to success when developing marketing programs. Ensuring that all teams are aligned on an initiative helps ensure that the core experience is consistent and immersive across all consumer touchpoints.”
– Kimberly Snead, CMO, Bookshop.org

There are multiple benefits to cross-functional collaboration:

1. Ensures alignment across the organization and with external partners.
2. Ensures authentic, consistent experiences at every touchpoint for customers and employees.
3. Facilitates faster innovation cycles and increased speed to market.
4. Helps avoid potential missteps that can lead to a disconnect between the brand promise and customer experience.
5. Reinforces the organization's culture and core values.

Cross-functional teams that are comprised of employees with different levels of expertise across various functions have a sense of shared ownership that makes customers' experiences with a brand more consistent and authentic.

Brand Management and Customer Experience: Implementing Change Management

If it is not already part of an organization's DNA, working cross-functionally can be a complex culture change to introduce. Simply put, **convincing people to change their behaviors is HARD**. Getting people to see past their functions, responsibilities, egos, and individual professional objectives can be challenging. Bad business processes, lack of understanding of each other's roles, and conflicting business goals can also negatively impact collaboration.

Aligning an organization to become more customer-centric and deliver financial value requires a fundamental shift in employee mindset and behaviors. While executive support is crucial to success, **eliminate using a top-down-only approach to impose change**. When decision-making is centralized at higher levels of the organization, employees tasked with the execution don't have a sense of shared ownership of the strategy.

What are other ways to break down any functional silos and encourage this behavior change?

1. Involve employees from different teams to participate in the co-creation process.
2. Facilitate workshops so everyone understands their roles and impact. There are Experience Creators (usually customer-facing and responsible for delivering the experience, i.e., Sales, Customer Service, etc.) and Experience Enablers (supporting roles that are not generally customer-facing, i.e., Operations, Product Development, etc.).
3. Improve internal communications to ensure the brand promise and experience expectations are clearly understood and supported, and for sharing progress and lessons learned.
4. Utilize preferred communication channels and set up collaborative workspaces; this is especially important in today's remote-hybrid-WFM world.
5. Ensure internal processes match company values and make it easy for employees to work together towards the company culture you're trying to build.
6. Provide employees with tools and the power of decision that allow them to feel empowered to help others.
7. Repetition and reinforcement through governance programs ensure consistent best practices, which are essential to drive accountability.

CONCLUSION

With customers calling the shots for the role they expect the brands they use to play in their lives, organizations can no longer afford to take a business-as-usual, top-down, siloed approach. Brand management and customer experience are two sides of the same coin: customer experience is the delivery of the brand promise, and changes to one affect the other. Cross-functional collaboration ensures alignment across the organization and gives employees a sense of shared ownership of the strategy, which empowers them to strive to provide a consistent customer experience. **To be truly customer-centric and profitable, organizations must take a holistic approach.**

About the Author

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Beth Karawan is an accomplished marketing professional, with experiences as a consultative market research supplier (IPSOS), agency leader and shopper activation expert (Catapult Marketing), and client-side brand strategist (Kraft Foods, L'Oréal, Canon).

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ImprintCX is a modern marketing and customer experience services company that seamlessly combines insights, consulting and activation into one integrated offering. The company is powered by sophisticated analytics, deep human understanding and design thinking to help organizations develop and deploy retention and lifetime value strategies for their high impact customers. Collectively, the ImprintCX team has developed and lead hundreds of customer experience transformations for Fortune 500 companies such as Mercedes Benz, Honeywell, Pizza Hut and Walmart.com.